

Exhibit No. 6Date 3-19-07**Testimony for HB713, Revise post-adoptive services, Sponsored By Representative HB 713
Tom McGillvary.**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: For the record my name is Moe Wosepka, I currently serve as Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. The Montana Catholic Conference is the public policy arm for the two Catholic Bishops in Montana.

For the past 10 years I worked for Good Samaritan Ministries in Helena. Our ministry was to the poor and homeless, the forgotten in our nursing homes, and the ignored in our prisons and jails. It is from this perspective that I speak to you today.

My work at the Good Samaritan was dedicated to finding ways to help our clients get back into the work force, and build self esteem and value through constructive activities. Those we worked with were under employed because they lacked education, training, transportation, and support. Many did not have even the basic skills needed to hold a job. Giving someone an opportunity to improve themselves through work was the best way to independence from welfare.

This is what we did at the Good Samaritan. Revenues from our Thrift Store paid all the overhead and operating expenses of our ministries, and we employed 33 people with an annual payroll of over \$300,000. Using that model and other models we studied from around the country, programs that were self supporting, and offered participants the opportunity to gain confidence and job skills in the same setting. We began to look at transitional living programs for ex-offenders from our prison system, the homeless and other groups.

It was then that I discovered another group that was falling through the cracks. These were ladies who had placed their babies for adoption. Most of these young ladies were low income, undereducated, teenage and living at home. Most had never had a full time job, and they were lacking parenting skills.

Most of those I talked too decided to parent. Some told me the reason was because of pressure from parents and peers. Other said if they parent they would get their own apartment, a cash allowance, food stamps, health care, and other state benefits. These benefits are not available if they place their baby for adoption. We all know the reason for this. The reason is that these state benefits are for the child not adults. And rightly so.

But there weren't any options for those who placed. These young ladies suffered a huge loss. A loss that none of us who haven't been there will fully understand. And it appeared to me that they were set aside. They were no longer the center of attention that had been when they were pregnant, and especially so as the impending birth drew near. After the birth of the child, and the relinquishment they felt they were very alone.

Now that's not totally true for some of the ladies. Those who worked through agencies like Catholic Social Services and Lutheran Social Services and other licensed agencies in

Montana are given some post natal counseling. These ladies were not cast aside, and this is not the point of this legislation. Those agencies who want to provide those services should be commended, and encouraged to continue.

My concern went beyond what services were currently being provided. I was thinking again in the manner of transitional living, and jobs and improving their chances in life through advancing their education, and job training, and life skills, so when they get pregnant again they would be in a better place to care for the baby and themselves.

I wanted to buy a big old house with 8 to 10 bedrooms, and provide living quarters for 4 or 5 young ladies who placed. The other rooms could perhaps be for a bed and breakfast. We could also host meetings and serve lunches, and perhaps even develop a catering business. While these ladies were living in the facility; they would have a chance to heal from their loss. Plus they would develop job skills and build self esteem through their work experience.

I thought it would be great to offer them scholarships. So I talked to the Knights of Columbus and Carroll College about sponsoring a scholarship. They were very receptive.

I was ready to proceed and then found out everything I wanted to do was against the law in Montana. Since these young ladies had placed their child, and we were offering the program to this specific group, it was against the law to offer a program that would provide educational benefits, vehicles, salary or wages, or permanent housing.

The problem is we could not offer the same help to these ladies that we could offer any other person; man, woman, or child. We could hire anyone else to work in this bed and breakfast but not a lady who placed her baby. We could provide a scholarship for a homeless person, an ex-con, but not a lady who places her baby. If we identified this specific group of young ladies who had made one of the most difficult decisions they may ever make, and treat them as a group. It was against the law.

I understand the concern of allowing wealthy individuals to offer huge cash settlements to anyone in exchange for a baby. But this is not offering cash settlements. It is offering the same opportunities we would offer anyone else, and it is post adoption.

We are not talking about state funding here. We understand that state funding is for the child. We are talking about raising our own funds from our work efforts in our Thrift Store, and donations.

Thank you for your time and your attention to this very important bill. It is for these reasons that the Montana Catholic Conference and the social justice efforts of the Catholic Church support this bill. We urge a do pass. Thank you.

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